

MARSHLAND RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL.

Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health for 1904.

To the Chairman and Members of the Rural District Council of Marshland.

GENTLEMEN,

I beg to present to you my 31st Annual Report, compiled on similar lines to last year, in compliance with a Memorandum from the Local Government Board.

If, in the following Report, I again refer to conditions of the District already well known to you all, and apparently unnecessary to mention, it should be remembered that these Annual Reports are for the information of the Local Government Board and County Council, as well as of your Council, and that a statement of the local circumstances, and a history of local sanitary questions, which may seem superfluous to you, may often be needed and appreciated by the former bodies.

As you are aware, the old combined District of Wisbech was divided into the Rural Districts of Marshland and Wisbech on the passing of the Local Government Act of 1894, in order that each should be within its County's limits, and consequently I am unable to go further back than 1895 with the Statistics required in the new Tables I. and II.

The following is my Report for 1904:—

THE DISTRICT consists of twelve parishes in the County of Norfolk, situated on the North and North-East of Wisbech, and has the general characteristic of Fen Country geology, viz.:—A deposition of peat and silt on sand and gravel, which in turn rests on boulder clay. The configuration of the District is distinctly flat—no part rising many feet above sea level. It is essentially rural in character, the density of population being one person to every $4\frac{1}{2}$ acres. The chief occupation followed is agriculture, which has now for many years been in a depressed condition.

VITAL STATISTICS.—Tables of Statistics are appended hereto, viz.:—The Tables I. to IV. required by the Local Government Board, and a new Table required by the Home Office under the Factory and Workshop Act of 1901.

POPULATION.—I have again estimated the population for the year on the Registrar-General's assumption that the rates of increase or decrease which obtained in the last decennial period will continue in this one, and the following rates are calculated on that estimation, viz.:—11,306, made up as follows: Terrington, 4,852; Walpole, 2,558; Emneth, 973; and Upwell, 2,923.

BIRTHS.—299 births were registered, as compared with 292 in 1903. The birth-rate was 26·4, and the natural increase, *i.e.*, the excess of births over deaths, 144.

DEATHS.—155 deaths were registered, as compared with 165 in 1903, and give a crude death-rate of 13·7 per 1,000.

AGE MORTALITY.—48 children under 5 years of age and 59 old people over 65 years died during the year. These figures show the mortality at the extremes of life, and were respectively 57 and 53 in 1903.

THE INFANT DEATH-RATE.—31 infants under one year of age died, giving a death-rate of 103·6 per 1,000 births, and 2·7 per 1,000 living.

ZYMOTIC DEATHS.—8 deaths (including one from Enteritis) were registered as occurring from the seven principal Zymotic Diseases, viz.:—(1) Small Pox; (2) Scarlet Fever; (3) Diphtheria; (4) Fevers, including Typhus, Typhoid or Enteric, and other continued Fevers; (5) Measles; (6) Whooping Cough; and (7) Diarrhœa.

THE ZYMOTIC DEATH-RATE derived from the above-mentioned diseases was .7 per 1,000 living, as compared with .8 in 1903.

NOTIFIABLE ZYMOTIC DISEASES.

The diseases notified in the District are those enumerated in the Infectious Disease (Notification) Act, 1889, viz.:—Small Pox, Cholera, Diphtheria, Membranous Croup, Erysipelas, the disease known as Scarlatina or Scarlet Fever, and the Fevers known by any of the following names:—Typhus, Typhoid, Enteric, Relapsing, Continued, or Puerperal; and Plague. To these you have added Chicken Pox owing to the prevalence of Small Pox in the country and the similarity between the diseases when the latter is modified by vaccination. The Act has been in force since June, 1896.

SCARLET FEVER.—A wide-spread epidemic of this disease prevailed in the District during the greater part of the year. 66 cases were notified; of these 23 occurred in Terrington Sub-District, 6 in Walpole, 23 in Emneth, and 14 in Upwell. One case in Emneth and two in Upwell proved fatal.

DIPHTHERIA.—3 cases were notified and all recovered.

ENTERIC FEVER.—3 cases were notified from the Upwell Sub-District and one proved fatal.

ERYSIPELAS.—3 non-fatal cases were notified from the Upwell Sub-District.

CHICKEN POX.—10 cases occurred, chiefly in the Terrington Sub-District; all recovered.

ISOLATION.—There is available the Isolation Hospital of the combined Districts of Walsoken Local Board, Wisbech Urban, Wisbech Rural, and your District, which contains 14 beds, and admission to which is practically free, as it ought to be, for removal to Hospital of infectious cases is done more for the public benefit than in the individual patient's interest. No advantage was taken of the Hospital during the year.

DISINFECTION.—The houses of all notified cases are visited by the Inspectors, disinfectants freely distributed, and on recovery or death the house is disinfected by an Inspector.

NON-NOTIFIABLE ZYMOTIC DISEASES.

MEASLES was prevalent to a slight extent and one case proved fatal in the Terrington Sub-District.

WHOOPIING COUGH also was slightly prevalent and one case in the Terrington Sub-District proved fatal.

DIARRHŒA.—3 deaths occurred, including one from Enteritis, which may be classed as a kindred disease. This is an unusually low number considering the long hot dry summer we experienced last year, and the fact that Diarrhœa is a disease of epidemic character, occurring chiefly in hot dry weather, and attacking hand-fed infants and old people.

OTHER DISEASES.

CANCER caused 8 deaths, as compared with 11 in 1903, and 18 in 1902. It is to be hoped that the numerous researches at present being carried out into the cause, prevention, and cure of this painful and fatal disease may bear good fruit in the immediate future.

PHTHISIS or CONSUMPTION caused 9 deaths, as compared with 10 in 1903. This is a disease which there is every hope may be prevented and cured by isolation and treatment in specially constructed sanatoria, and under—as far as we know them—perfect sanitary conditions.

For the sake of comparison I give the rates for Rural England and Wales, which have been provisionally compiled by the Registrar-General:—Birth-rate, 26.8; Death-rate, 15.3; Zymotic Death-rate, 1.28; and Infant Mortality, 125.

GENERAL.

THE WATER SUPPLY.—A small number of the inhabitants derive their supply from the town mains, the water of which is derived from the chalk formation ; it is excellent in quality and abundant in quantity, being on the constant system. The vast majority of the people, however, have to depend on rain water for their domestic supply, as the subsoil water is grossly polluted by the necessary agricultural operations, and in places is even brackish. The rainfall is collected in water-tight underground cisterns, safeguarded as far as possible from contamination.

THE SEWERAGE OF THE DISTRICT.—There is no system of sewage disposal, the houses for the most part being drained to cesspools. Some, however, still drain into the nearest dyke, but these are gradually being remedied. The excrement disposal is by means of deep privy middens, one of the most frequent sources of nuisance in the District, and which I have for many years advocated should be converted into pail closets. There is no public scavenging, the house refuse being disposed of in their gardens by the occupiers.

WORK DONE.

129 visits of inspection were made during the year by the Inspectors ; this represents the abatement of many nuisances without formal notice having to be served. Certificates were granted for the occupation of 30 new houses, and orders were made for the construction of 14 water cisterns, 5 new privies, and 1 new cesspool.

THE DAIRIES AND COW SHEDS, as well as the SLAUGHTER HOUSES, KNACKERS' YARDS, and FRUIT PICKERS' BUNKS in the District have been inspected by the Inspector and myself, and generally found in a clean and satisfactory condition. In addition, I have made systematic inspection of the District in company with the Inspectors, besides attending to any complaints received, and frequent inspections made when on my professional rounds.

THE FACTORY AND WORKSHOP ACT, 1901.—This Act came into force on January 1st, 1902, and requires me to report specifically on the administration of the Act in "Workshops" and "Workplaces," and send a copy of this Report to the Secretary of State. Unfortunately for the Marshland Rural District, the staple industry is agriculture, which continues in a very depressed state, and in the adjacent towns it is chiefly connected with the wholesale timber trade and the making of agricultural implements, industries which do not put out "home work;" and as regards "Workshops" and "Workplaces," I do not know of any, other than the small village Bakehouses, Blacksmiths' and Carpenters' Shops, all of which are kept in a fairly good sanitary state. A list of these, and all particulars required in connection with them, compiled from the official Register, is appended hereto, in compliance with the requirements of the above Act.

Finally, I am responsible for the portion of this Report which deals with the period extending from January 1st to December 1st, and my successor—Dr. FORREST, of Terrington St. John,—for that referring to the remainder of the year.

I have the honour to be, Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

E. C. BURY,

Late Medical Officer of Health.

5, York Row, Wisbech.

January 31st, 1905.

